



勇者で ある 白鳥歌野は

— 特別書きおろし番外編 —

Shiratori Utano
wa YUSHA
de aru

No matter what hardships may come our way,

humanity will always get back on its feet--

Those words were a pillar of support.

That was why she was always looking ahead.

Why she always smiled brightly.

She was the most radiant thing

in this closed, illogical world.

A piercing blue sky spread out overhead.

The summer sunlight relentlessly poured out across the vast land.

Fujimori Mito watched from the side of the field as her friend, Shiratori Utano swung a hoe. Several adults around Utano were similarly swinging hoes, plowing the field. Everyone was facing the crop-cultivating land as they sweat.

They were in the plain by the foot of Nagano prefecture's Mt. Moriya.

Utano and the adults were cultivating the field to raise vegetables.

"Let's take a break, everyone!"

At Utano's sign, the surrounding adults paused their work and wiped their sweat. They took shelter under the shade of trees as they made idle chatter like "I hope this year's crops turn out well" or "If only we had commercial farming equipment" and "Be thankful for what we've got". Nagano was known for being a summer resort, so while it may have had the image of being a cool, refreshing area, it was in truth not much different from the rest of Japan in terms of heat or sun. Agricultural work there in the dead of summer ran the risk of heatstroke if you weren't careful.

(I really wouldn't be able to do that, huh...)

Mito smiled wryly. plowing a field did require some strength, so it was hard work for a middle school girl. Utano was a strange one to be enjoying it.

(There's that whole divine protection of the hero thing going on, but above all else, Utanon loves farming.)

As Mito had such thoughts, she was poked in the cheek by some sort of cylindrical object.

"Ow, ow, the spines hurt. Stop poking me with that cucumber, Utanon."

"But it's nice and cool, isn't it?"

When Mito turned around, she saw Utano holding a cucumber. She was carrying a basket filled with cucumbers and tomatoes. Probably today's harvest.



"The crop's delicious again this year. It's great that we can make other vegetables too."

Utano took out a kitchen knife and rubbed the back of it against the cucumber to remove the spines. She then snapped it in two and took a bite out of one half.

"Mmm, tastes good! Try some, Mii-chan!"

Utano held out the other half of the cucumber to Mito. Mito took the cucumber half and bit into it with her small mouth. The pleasant coolness and freshness characteristic of summer vegetables spread throughout her mouth.

"Yummy"

"I know, right!?"

Utano smiled happily. Seeing that bright face made Mito happy as well.

Mito swallowed what was in her mouth before speaking.

"Utanon, you really love tinkering with the field, don't you?"

"Well, I'm gonna be a farm king after all!"

"A farm king... sounds kinda cool."

"But even better than a farm king is a farm emperor, and better than that is a farm god. The path of farming is deep and endless..."

Utano spoke with a somehow far-looking gaze.

"Ahahah, how does the farming hierarchy in your head work, Utanon? Anyway, you're pretty good for someone not from a family with a farming background."

"And yet I fell in love with farm work... It was destiny. Mii-chan, if you tried plowing with me, I'm sure you'd understand the wonders of farming."

"No thanks. I'm not good with insects."

"I see... Too bad."

Despite her dejected word, Utano didn't seem particularly disappointed in the slightest as she continued to nibble on her cucumber.

(But I do like watching you work the fields, Utanon.)

Mito poured some barley tea from a canteen into a paper cup and handed it to Utano.

"Thanks."

Utano drank the tea from the cup as she watched the adults resting in the shade. Fieldwork in the dead of summer was tiring, yet everyone had a look of fulfillment on their faces.

"Seems like everyone's starting to have bright looks on their faces."

Mito nodded at Utano's elated words.

They weren't always this positive, though.

Mito thought back to that day-- three years prior, when those monsters appeared in the sky, and everything that happened since...

End of July, 2015

All sorts of natural disasters like earthquakes and floods broke out, throwing Japan into chaos.

As the final blow, the Vertexes appeared and relentlessly killed people, sending humanity into an abyss of despair.

Right after the Vertexes appeared in Nagano, a barrier was formed in the area around Lake Suwa, within which no damage took place. However, those unlucky enough to be outside the barrier were unable to escape, and many lost their lives.

Amidst the chaos, one awoke as a hero: Shiratori Utano. Without regards to her own safety, she left the barrier and fought the Vertexes, saving many people.

That was when she met Mito. In the midst of the people rushing into the safety of the barrier, Mito saw Utano fighting the monsters.

Afterwards, Utano and Mito were informed by the Taisha in Shikoku via telecommunications that they were "hero" and "miko"-- the only sort of beings that could oppose the Vertexes. Those two were told to protect and guide the people of Suwa.

But Utano and Mito were mere 14-year-old girls. The residents of Nagano were unable to place complete confidence in the strength of such young girls.

Utano appealed to the hopeless, despairing people.

"We may be in a harsh situation right now, but I'm sure we'll find a means of survival. Humanity will always get back on its feet! So for now, we need to prepare for that moment. Let's all work together to live on!"

Utano swung her hoe, plowing the field.

"If we want to live in the barrier, we need to be self-sufficient. Let's cultivate the fields and catch fish! Whatever we can to survive!"

At first, Utano had few sympathizers.



There was no conceivable way humanity could survive in such a cramped, shut out land. Everyone had abandoned all hope... they believed they would all be wiped out sooner or later.

But Utano never gave up. She kept appealing to the people. She continued cultivating the field by herself.

"Humanity has kept surviving, no matter what calamities have come our way. I'm sure we can get back on our feet again!"

However, the Vertexes persistently commenced attacks in an attempt to destroy the barrier. And each time, Utano would fight them. If anybody from the outside came seeking shelter in Suwa, she would leave the barrier to save them, without any regard to her own safety.

And not once did she complain.

She always smiled.

Even if a Vertex injured her. Even if a resident disparaged her.

She continued to protect Suwa, unwilling to abandon even a single person.

And thus, after a year had passed--

As Utano continued to work hard without ever losing hope, one by one, the residents began helping her. Some cultivated the fields with her. Others provided boats so they could fish in Lake Suwa.

Eventually, smiles formed on their faces as well.

Instead of wallowing in their sorrow, they chose to work their bodies, clearing themselves of dark emotion. But it was by no means an escape from reality. The people had taken their first steps forward.

"No matter what hardships may come our way,

humanity will always get back on its feet--"

That had become a mantra for the people of Suwa.

As she watched the adults resting in the shade, Mito thought to herself.

(So in the end, Utano singlehandedly pulled all of Suwa together, huh.)

Fighting the Vertexes and bestowing the people of Suwa with the will to live... It was all Utano's doing.

As she watched her friend bite into a tomato, Mito honestly thought of her as nothing less than amazing. Had their roles as hero and miko been reversed, Mito probably would not have been able to handle herself as Utano did.

--Suddenly, an ear-splitting siren rang out from a nearby area.

The adults' faces tensed.

The siren was an alarm of an incoming Vertex attack.

But without losing her calm, bright tone, Utano addressed everyone in the area.

"Scramble! The hero Shiratori Utano is off to battle!"

And without any hesitation, she broke out into a dash.

The sight of Utano acting like her normal self immediately dissipated the fear and tension in everyone's faces. Everyone cried out to the dashing hero.

"Go for it!" "Come back safe!" "I believe in you!" "We're counting on you!"

As she listened to those words of encouragement, Utano responded heartily.

"Sure thing! I swear I'll protect Suwa and everyone in it, so please take refuge as away from the barrier's boundary!"

"Wait, Utanon! I'm coming too!"

Mito chased after Utano.

Utano and Mito arrived at the Suwa Taisha kamisha honmiya (the upper main shrine) near the field. Utano's hero weapon and outfit were enshrined in its Kaguraden (ceremonial dance hall).

The guardian kami of Suwa was a god of war, a prince god of the earth. It was said that this god once used a wisteria vine as a weapon in a battle against another god. Imbued with divine might, his wisteria vine was powerful enough to crush the opposing god's weapon of iron.

The whip that served as Utano's hero weapon was imbued with the same spiritual power as that god of war's wisteria vine.

Utano stripped off her farming clothes and began garbing herself with the outfit imbued with the divine protection of the gods. It was somewhat hard to move in, but it reduced the damage done to the body.

"Mii-chan, which direction are the Vertexes coming from!?"

Utano asked as she changed.

Ever since the enemy raid siren began ringing, an abstract image had been floating in the back of Mito's head. A miko oracle. The local kami was telling her the site of the enemy invasion.

"Southeast from here! Their target is probably the kamisha maemiya (the upper old shrine)!"

"I bet they're after the maemiya's 'mihashira (sacred pillars)'. Heheh. Looks like it's time to set our stage then! The show's about to start!"



After she finished changing, Utano flew out of the kagura-den.

"Ahh~ she's gone."

Mito sighed as she watched her leave.

As a hero, Utano's running speed was beyond anything Mito could follow as a miko. Nevertheless, she couldn't just stand around doing nothing, so she followed Utano at a human's pace.

The Mihashira Barrier-- that was the name of the barrier protecting Suwa.

Suwa Taisha, which enshrined a local kami, was divided into four buildings in the vicinity of Lake Suwa: the kamisha honmiya, the kamisha maemiya, the shimosha harumiya (the lower spring shrine), and the shimosha akimiya (the lower fall shrine). Enclosed by the four shrines was a gigantic pillar. But upon the Vertex invasion three years ago, several similar pillars appeared along the boundary connecting the four shrines. The pillars formed a barrier within which the Vertexes could not enter.

However, the Vertexes appeared in a horde and continued to attack the mihashira forming the barrier.

The mihashira were by no means indestructible. If they were to be destroyed, collapsing the barrier, Suwa would be annihilated. As a hero, Utano's role was to protect the mihashira by countering any Vertexes that attacked them.

However, even heroes have their limits, and the waves of Vertexes kept growing in size. In response to the intensifying attacks, the local kami scaled the barrier down in size to scale it up in strength. Now in 2018, the shimosha harumiya and akimiya were already destroyed and only the southeast Lake Suwa area remained protected by the barrier.

By the time Mito arrived at the kamisha maemiya grounds with roughness of breath, Utano had already defeated most of the Vertexes.

Mito sighed in relief to see Utano safe.

(... Thank goodness. Looks like it's another safe battle.)

Utano moved her whip around the air at will, quickly and firmly striking each Vertex attacking the mihashira. The bodies of each struck monster corroded and vanished.

"And you're-- the last one!"

After striking down the final enemy, Utano took a deep breath and turned back towards Mito.





"Ah, Mii-chan. You came, huh."

"Well, yeah... I was worried."

"Heheh. There's no way I can lose. As you can see, it's a complete victory! You should be worrying about your own safety, Mii-chan. You should've evacuated."

The area near the mihashira which served as the barrier's boundary line was where the Vertexes could just barely invade. Mito was at risk of getting attacked.

"Though, I guess if it's just you, Mito, I can protect you! Welp, let's get back to ploughing."

With that nonchalant remark, Utano made an about face, leaving Mito somewhat surprised.

"What? You're still going to do farm work!? Shouldn't you at least give it a rest after fighting Vertexes?"

"Non, non. Crops wait for no man. Besides--"

The hero girl smiled.

"Plowing the fields is a precious 'routine' that I want to cherish."

Upon returning from the Vertex battle, Utano and Mito were showered with gracious gratitude.

Utano in particular received words of praise from the residents.

"Heh heh heh. There's more where that came from! Please, praise me more!"

Utano was quite self-confident, and a show off at that.

Afterwards, Utano returned to plowing the fields with the people as Mito watched.

And such was the daily routine for Utano and Mito-- or rather, the daily routine of Suwa as a whole.

Though the people feared the monster menace, they offered their prayers to the gods, to the hero, and to the miko, living their lives meagerly, but eagerly.

Since Suwa did not receive as many divine blessings as Shikoku, they were lacking in materials and resources, making life difficult. Even so, the people found happiness in living a quiet life of self-sufficiency.

As Utano swung her hoe underneath the blue sky, Mito could only wish she could watch her fondly like this forever.

Fujimori Mito was a very timid, mature girl.

Before she could even remember, she was on bad terms with her parents and grandparents, and thus she was perhaps a little overanalytical about people's facial expressions.

She was bad at asserting herself, her personality was gloomy, and people would often say they had no clue what she was thinking. As a result, she lost her self confidence, she would get too caught up in her thoughts, lose even more self confidence... and she kept digging herself into a deeper and deeper hole.

By the time she entered middle school, she had become a girl lacking in both a will and a presence.

"You've got trouble coming your way in the future if you don't change yourself."

Mito's mother said coldly in frustration at her daughter's character.

Mito couldn't even begin to imagine her own future. But she suspected that her life would end the same way it was now: she would accomplish nothing, attract no attention, and live her days quietly.

For that reason, Mito's meeting with Utano came as a huge shock.

Utano had a completely undaunting personality. She stood before everyone else and brought people together.

She never hesitated in consideration of what negative thoughts others might have. She triumphantly marched down whatever path she believed in.

And before she knew it, Utano was at the center of everyone's attention.

She's like the exact opposite of me-- Mito thought.

One day, near the end of August.

Utano was using a telecommunications device installed in the kamisha's sanshu-den (assembly hall) to contact Shikoku. Shikoku was the only other known bastion of humanity besides Suwa, and was defended by five heroes led by a girl named Nogi Wakaba. Utano was currently speaking with that Wakaba.

"Yes, there was another attack today, but the enemy was safely repulsed. ... Yes, I am indeed that strong, despite how I look. Wait, you can't see me through this thing, can you? ... Yes, as usual, we worked on cultivating some fields. ... I wish I could just send you some of our famous Shinshu vegetables, Nogi-san."

Mito read a book in the corner of the room and peeked at Utano conversing with Wakaba.

She looked like she was having fun talking to her.

At times like these, Mito felt a feeling she couldn't quite describe. Her heart would stir, and she couldn't calm it.

"Very well, same time, then. ... Ending transmission."

Utano cut communications with Shikoku. She then turned to Mito and gave her a dubious look.

"Mii-chan, what's with the glare?"



"... Utanon, there's something weird about the way you talk when you're communicating with Shikoku. You speak all formally like you're trying to be an adult. It doesn't fit you."

"Well, it's technically professional work for me, since communicating officially with Shikoku as a hero, so I need to be polite. I mean, look, doesn't everyone try to sound polite on the phone or in letters?"

"No."

Mito replied curtly.

"Huh? But why are you calling out only me? Nogi-san doesn't speak casually either. Actually, now that I think about it, the way Nogi-san speaks makes her sound kind of like an old-school bushi or something. It's kinda funny, actually. I wonder if she speaks like that normally? Oh, speaking of Nogi-san, just the other day--"

"I'm going to eat dinner."

Before Utano could finish, Mito stood up. For some reason she didn't want to hear another word.

"Wait, wait, Mii-chan!"

Flustered, Utano grabbed Mito's hand to stop her.

"I'll go too. Food tastes better when I eat it with you, Mii-chan."

"..."

The sight of Utano's nonchalant smile calmed down Mito's heart.

"... Okay, let's go."

Underneath the sky dyed crimson by the setting sun, Utano and Mito entered a soba store.

Shinshu soba-- a dish local to Nagano.

The buckwheat that goes into soba is easy to raise in cold, high-altitude soil, and is thus suitable for Nagano's climate. Thus, soba became widely made in Nagano as an irreplaceable staple of the residents' diet. Masterfully handmade soba noodles require proper ratios of buckwheat flour and water, and only the noodles that pass strict conditions have the honor of being called "Shinshu soba".

"Yeah, it's yummy!"

Deeply moved, Utano praised the food as she slurped the zaru soba. The fact that she could eat it essentially every day without tiring of it was proof of the excellence of Shinshu soba's quality.

"Soba in warm broth is good too, but in the summer, zaru soba is the best. It's truly a cool dish."

"Utanon, you always get a large serving, don't you?"

"You gotta eat if you want to have the strength to plow the fields! Soba in particular has an amazing amino acid score of 100%!"

"Amino acid score...?"

"Basically, soba's made outta the good stuff!"

As Utano spoke, she ate at twice the rate Mito was.

"But if we don't increase the number of buckwheat fields, we might not have enough buckwheat flour. Buckwheat grows fast enough to have two harvests a year, but to be honest, the high ground outside the barrier is better suited for cultivation than what we've got..."

Even as she ate, Utano's mind was apparently focused on her beloved farm work.

"... Utanon, I'm sorry about earlier."

"Huh? What for?"

"I'm sorry for acting mad..."

What displeased Mito was the fact that Utano was getting along with someone besides her. Childish jealousy.

"You're just so radiant in my eyes, Utanon. You're always so proactive, so hard-working, and you're always the center of attention... I'm sure everyone in Nagano, and even Nogi-san in Shikoku loves you, Utanon."

In contrast, Mito had a negative character, and only had Utano to call a friend. For that reason, seeing Utano get along with someone else made her feel insecure. She felt like she was getting left behind.

"I think you're popular with everyone yourself, Mii-chan. Everyone in Nagano loves you and thinks you're cool."

"That's only because I happened to be chosen as a miko... That's why I became your friend, too. People only see me as special for what I am rather than who I am."

Even before she had the social standing of a hero, Utano was originally proactive and hard-working, so everyone thought well of her. There was a fundamental difference between her and Mito, who was loved "because" she was a miko. "Because" she was Shiratori Utano's partner.

(I have nothing... I just happened to be chosen as a miko. I'm sure that's why everyone--)



"Hey, come on, Mii-chan!"

Utano scolded Mito and poked her in the forehead.

"Don't think so negatively in hindsight, Mii-chan. You just don't realize your own awesomeness. Just trust me, I know. You've saved people, Mii-chan."

"Huh...?"

"You saved a child who escaped from the barrier from a Vertex, remember? You left the barrier yourself, distracted the Vertex... and the kid used that opportunity to escape to safety. That was amazing."

"That's... only because in the end, you came to save us. If it were just me, then the kid and I would've both been killed..."

"But still, not everyone can do that. I might save people using the power I was given, but what you did is way, way, way braver than that. And that's what makes you-- a hero, Mii-chan."

"Thank you..."

Mito looked away in embarrassment.

(But the only reason I even thought of working hard and trying to save people like that... was because you were standing in front of things and taking charge, Utanon.)

Utano's existence gave Mito strength.

Utano's existence made Mito special. At least a little bit.

Day by day, it became more and more difficult to connect the line between Suwa and Shikoku.

"Obviously, udon is better... ZZZZ... not even worth comparing."

"You're right about that last part. It's not worth comparing since soba is clearly better."

"... ZZZ... have you even eaten Kagawa udon before? ... ZZZ... its unparalleled, beautiful pure whiteness..."

Both Utano and Mito could tell that the power of Suwa's local kami was weakening.

Regardless, Utano kept showing her bright, proactive appearance and behavior.

Each day, she plowed the fields.

She fought the invading Vertexes.

Every now and then, she communicated with Shikoku.

--And eventually, Suwa spent its fourth summer after the Vertexes first appeared.

And then on September.

The enemy launched a full-scale attack.

Their numbers were way too many. Utano became quite injured.

The Vertex swarm surrounded her, rammed into her, chewed away at her with mouth-like organs... but nevertheless, she defeated all of her enemies, leaving Suwa unscathed in its entirety.

After the battle was over, but before Utano went to the hospital, she went to the telecommunications device in the kamisha honmiya's sanshu-den.

"Utano, what are you doing!? You need to get your injuries treated!"

Mito chased her from behind, shouting such, but Utano forced a smile and answered.

"Today's... a scheduled day to contact Shikoku, isn't it? I'm a little late, though..."

She had missed the arranged contact time by two hours.

"Treating your wounds comes first!"

"Contacting Shikoku is another part of my precious 'routine'. So I need to maintain it--"

Just then, Shikoku called in.

Utano turned the receiver on.

"--This is Nogi from Shikoku. We established contact late today, so did anything... ZZZ... ZZZ..."

The transmission noise was louder than usual. Words could only be heard intermittently.

"I'm sorry, Nogi-san. There was a kind of a big battle over here, so it was a little hectic."

"... ZZZ... That's fine. Did anything happen... ZZZZZZ..."

"This afternoon, there was a skirmish with the Vertexes."

"... ZZZZZZ... Any damage... ZZZ..."

"No problems here. I got a little injured, but I repelled the enemy. No human casualties."

At times her face would warp in the pain from her injuries, but Utano kept speaking as if things were normal.

Mito felt helpless as she watched her.

The barrier shrank, the local kami's power weakened, and the Vertex attacks intensified.



Even Utano had to realize it-- Suwa was unlikely to last much longer.

(Kami of the land... we're at our limits...!)

Mito shouted out in her mind. But she could not tell if her voice reached any ears. Though she was a miko, any divine communication had been one-way-- miko merely received oracles from the gods.

In a past oracle, back when Shikoku had arranged Vertex counter-methods, it was told that Shikoku and Suwa were to perform a pincer attack to reclaim territory. Shikoku had an anti-Vertex organization known as the "Taisha" and they even had five heroes. It was told that if only they were to prepare for it, the situation of the war would change for the better, so they should bide their time until then. However--

(We can't wait any longer...! Suwa can't... Utanon can't... go on any longer...!)

It wouldn't be long before Mito received a new oracle:

The enemy was launching a large-scale attack unlike anything ever seen.

Perhaps a Vertex general offensive.

The barrier was likely crumbling.

And-- an invasion of Suwa was was inevitable.

But even after the oracle was received, there was no visible change in Utano. She looked over the crops nearing harvest and cheerfully spoke.

"Pumpkin, daikon, corn. Yup, everything's growing good. Gotta think of what to plant next soon, huh... Hey, Mii-chan. What kinds of seeds do you think are left in the honmiya storage?"

"... I think there's a good variety left. Like buckwheat or daikon..."

Mito desperately tried to hide the quivering in her voice.

"Ah, sounds good. It's the perfect season to plant buckwheat and daikon."

"--Utanon...!"

Mito struggled to find the words to say to the brightly speaking Utano.

"Utanon, how can you act like everything's normal...? Aren't you scared!? Tomorrow, we're already gonna be...!"

Killed. She couldn't get that last word out of her throat.

No matter how strong Utano was, she would likely lose to enemy numbers surpassing those of the previous battle.

Furthermore, if the barrier crumbled, then nothing would be stopping the monsters from rushing into Suwa.

And then Suwa would be no more.

But Utano smiled just as she always did--

"I am scared. I really, truly am."

--and said just that.

Utano's smile gradually crumbled into a face filled with fear. Mito had never seen Utano like this before.

"But even if I'm scared... I don't want to sit back and do nothing. Anything but that. The thought of freezing in fear and doing nothing... as people die in front of me... Now that's even scarier..."

That was surely Utano's true thoughts.

Utano was forcing herself to work hard too-- even Mito could tell.

But a smile soon returned to the hero's face.

"It's okay. I'm not alone. I've got you, Mii-chan. And even if they're far away, we've got hero friends in Shikoku. And so... and so... I can keep at it."

"...!!"

Mito nearly broke out into tears. But she frantically held them back. She couldn't let herself cry if Utano herself wasn't crying.

"I know! Mii-chan, there's something I want to do. I want to leave some proof we were here... a record of our thoughts and feelings. Something to find for the people who one day will surely come here."

Utano brought in a large wooden box and placed a hoe and a sheet of paper inside.

Afterwards, Utano and Mito dug up some soil beside the field and buried the wooden box inside.

"If someday, someone finds this box... our feelings will reach them. And I'm sure... we can entrust them with our wish."

Utano spoke with a smile.

The setting sun stretched out their shadows.



And then, the day of the final battle began.

"... Finish!"

Utano struck down the last Vertex that had attacked the kamisha honmiya's mihashira. The white monster shrieked as it disintegrated.

"Haah... haah... way to go, me. You're so strong..."

Mito rushed up to support Utano before she fell.

"Utanon! Hang in there!"

"Ugh... thank you."

Just how many waves had she defeated already today? The Vertex raid siren had been blaring constantly since morning.

Although heroes had beyond human stamina, Utano's fatigue was reaching its limit. Her body was clearly injured as well.

But the battle so far hadn't seen the full effort yet from the Vertexes. There weren't nearly as many enemies as the oracle had foretold. At most, these had been advanced troops sent to either check out the situation or to whittle down Utano's stamina.

Suddenly, an abstract image floated in the back of Mito's mind.

(Ah... another... oracle...)

The oracle's meaning--

An extraordinary number of Vertexes would appear surrounding Suwa's barrier.

"Here it comes... this is the general offensive..."

Mito's body wouldn't stop shaking.

The end of Suwa had begun.

But nonetheless, Utano...

"... It's about time I contacted Shikoku, huh. Gotta go..."

Battered and in the face of despair, Utano tried to maintain her daily routine.

Not even Mito had had it in her to stop Utano now.

Mito supported Utano as the two of them headed to the sanshu-den.

"... No, I just exterminated some annoyingly persistent Vertexes, that's all... It's like I've been fighting since early in the morning... Looks like the communications device was broken as a result of the Vertex invasion, huh. ... Doesn't look like we'll be able to communicate for a while."

In the sanshu-den, Mito silently watched as Utano talked through the communications device while concealing her injuries and fatigue.

The communications device being broken was a lie. But today, Suwa was done for. So either way, they would no longer be able to communicate.

"I think it's going to be tough over there too... but please do your best. As long as you don't give up, I'm sure you'll manage. ... I thought it was an impossible duty at first too, but... I've kept it up two years longer than expected. I've grown lots of vegetables too... and I've made friends with you, Nogi-san... It's been a pleasure. Ahh, geez, there's so much noise... We can hardly hear each other, huh."

Utano gave her final words of the transmission through gritted teeth.

"Nogi-san, the rest is up to you. Please take care."

She ended transmissions there.

The communications device would likely never reconnect to Shikoku again.

Mito sidled up to Utano and gently embraced her. No matter how hard she tried, Mito could not stop the tears flowing from her eyes.

"Please don't cry, Mii-chan."

An awkward smile spread across Utano's face. Utano's attitude never changed, not even in times like these.

"... I just received an oracle. The last one, apparently..."

"What did it say?"

Utano gently asked the weeping Mito.

"We did well to protect Suwa for three whole years... Since the two of us kept the enemy distracted so long, Shikoku was able to lay down a foundation of defense against the enemy."

"I see..."

So Suwa was a decoy to let Shikoku prepare for battle. Utano and Mito had vaguely noticed that fact, so it was no surprise.

"This is just..."

Too much, Mito thought.

But Utano, however, smiled in relief.

"Thank goodness... really. So our three-year struggle wasn't meaningless then, huh."

Utano and Mito stood within the kamisha honmiya grounds.

They saw huge numbers of Vertexes floating around the circumference of the barrier, enough to cover the sky. One group fused, forming a new, different, gigantic form.

Before long, the monsters would all surge in at once.



"Hey, Utanon."

"What is it?"

"Your future goal is to be a farm king, right?"

"Yeah, I want lots of people to eat my vegetables. That's my dream."

"I see. ...You know, I've never had a dream of my own."

"..."

"I've always thought I'd spend my life accomplishing nothing. So... I've never had a dream or anything."

"Mii-chan..."

"But you see, that all changed when I met you, Utanon. As long as you were by my side, I felt like I could be anything."

"Yeah..."

"So... I want to run a vegetable delivery service. That way I can spread your vegetables all across Japan. No, all across the world."

"... The world? You mean the whole el mundo!?"

"Yeah. The whole world."

"¡Excelente!"

"I won't know how to do everything at first. I'll argue with you over business matters, and it won't start out too well."

"Yeah."

"But even if we fight, we'll quickly make up. And gradually, I'll be able to deliver everything properly."

"Yeah, yeah!"

"Your vegetables' popularity will spread by word of mouth and in no time, we'll have tons of orders rushing in. I'll be busy every day delivering them."

"Yeah."

"And eventually, the adults, the children, the poor, the rich, and everyone in-between will eat your vegetables with smiles on their faces."

"..."

"That's... my dream."

"... In that case..."





Utano looked up to the Vertex-covered sky.

"Then for the sake of our dream, we can't let this world fall to ruin, can we!?"

All at once, the white monsters began rushing towards the kamisha honmiya.

"Mii-chan. To tell you the truth, I've been working hard every day till now because you were there beside me."

Utano said with a smile.

The hero girl kicked off of the ground.

"Yeah... I'm with you to the very end, Utanon. I'll keep watching you from here..."

As she watched Utano head off toward the horde of monsters one last time, Mito stayed in one place, her feet fixed to the ground, her eyes fixed upon Utano.

(Extra Chapter End)